

Parting Ways, Part 1 - Acts 15:36-41– June 1st, 2008

- There are several passages in the book of Acts that I've been really looking forward to studying and teaching and this is one of them.
- The reason for this is because God has used this account in these verses to speak into my life in a most powerful way over the years.
- There are so many lessons that we can learn from what happened between Paul and Barnabas when they parted ways here in Acts 15.

- I would like to take and tackle this passage a little bit differently than I have in the past, so as to adequately mine the riches in this text.
- Instead of the usual three or four point sermon I think it would be appropriate to look specifically at Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark.

- If you were to put a title on this teaching, it would probably have to be something along the lines of; "Parting Ways."
- Here's how Luke, by the Holy Spirit, records what happened between Paul and Barnabas when they had this intense argument.

36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." 37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.

v36 Some time had passed since the Jerusalem conference and Paul proposed to Barnabas that they go on another missionary trip.

v37-38 Barnabas wants to take John Mark with them, but Paul objects because he had deserted them in Paymphyia, (Acts 13:13).

Acts 13:13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. NIV

39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

v39 They had such an intense and heated argument that they end up parting ways and Barnabas takes Mark and goes to Cyprus.

v40-41 Paul chooses Silas and leaves, and is sent off to Syria and Cilicia with the blessing and being commended to the Lord.

- It's hard to imagine, but they had known each other for 10 years, serving in the ministry together for the better part of six of those years.
- While they had encountered unbelievable hardship on their first missionary journey, they had also experienced unspeakable success.
- They were the quintessential evangelistic and pastoral team of missionaries and church planters and now they have split up for good.
- Let's unpack this passage by answering some questions that may help us gain insight into what the Holy Spirit wants us to know.

Question #1: Who's right and whose wrong, Paul or Barnabas?

- Both were both right and wrong.

"Theologians throughout the ages have debated which of the men was wrong. Some state that Paul was too harsh in his treatment of Mark; others claim Barnabas permitted family relationships to interfere in his assessment of what was needed to extend the kingdom of God. Maybe both were wrong, or both were right. It might help if we try to recapture the ancient scene, [with] 'what might have been said.'

Paul: "There is danger ahead. Since Mark failed so miserably, how can he possibly be an example for other young men still to be won for Christ?"

Barnabas: "That boy made a mistake, and he knows it. He is ready to try again. Paul, did you ever make a mistake, and did God turn you down forever? When Simon Peter failed, did Christ reject further disservice? No, He forgave him. He reinstated him, and we will do the same for Mark."

Paul: "Barnabas, the Lord gave guidance concerning problems of this type. He said that no man who puts his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Barnabas: "Paul, after being a murderer, are you fit to serve? With your record, what kind of an example do you expect to be? To reject this lad is to damn him in the eyes of the whole church."

Paul: "Brother, it might be kind, even to Mark himself, if we leave him behind. He is not cut out for this type of service. He might render better service in Jerusalem."

Barnabas: "We should help and not hinder anyone who desires to serve the Lord. If you refuse, you are not like the Master you proclaim."

Paul: "Barnabas, you have become biased; you have allowed family relationships to interfere with your judgment of what is necessary for our work."

Barnabas: "Paul, whatever you say or do in this matter, I will not be a part of anything unchristian."

Paul: "Barnabas, I am here to do the will of God, not just to please you. Mark is not coming with us."

Barnabas: "You are wrong, Paul. Mark is coming – and that is that."

Ivor Powell "The Amazing Acts" p262

"My own sympathy is entirely with Barnabas... Paul was severe because Mark had failed them..."

G. Campbell Morgan

"Paul would not go out a second time with a faint-hearted deserter, and he was right. Barnabas, believing that John Mark was penitent for what he had done, and would henceforth be faithful, wished to give him another opportunity;" and he was right. Now, since these two brethren had each right on his side, neither of them could yield the point without violating his honest judgment, and we do not therefore wonder that the contention grew hot. The Holy Spirit is very considerate in thus recording the difficulties which occurred even among inspired men. How can we expect always to see eye to eye, when Paul and Barnabas differed?"

Charles Spurgeon

"The only place here on earth where there's not conflict among God's people is in the cemetery."

A.W. Tozer

"We need both the Paul's and Barnabas' in ministry. We don't have to choose between them and we don't have to try to change them."

Pastor Damian Kyle, Calvary Chapel Modesto

"There was no help for it but to part. Barnabas went one way with his nephew, and Paul another with Silas. Mark turned out well, and so justified the opinion of Barnabas, but Paul could not foresee that, and is not to be condemned for acting upon the general rule that he who puts his hand to the plough and looks back has proved himself unworthy."

Charles Spurgeon

Luke 9:62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."
NIV

Question #2: Why did John Mark desert them in Pamphylia?

1. It's possible that he became afraid. *(Sometimes we can become fearful and fail to remain faithful to that which God has called us to.)*
2. Maybe it was too difficult for him. *(Often times because of the hardship, we end up failing because of the intensity of the adversity.)*
3. Perhaps he had become homesick. *(Sometimes were just not emotionally ready, and end up failing and quitting because of family.)*
4. He may not have liked Paul's intensity. *(Often we quit because we don't like the leadership style of those in authority over us.)*

- How does this all end up? What happens to Barnabas and John Mark? Lord willing, we'll look at that next week in part two.

- Be that as it may, we will see how God is able to take this ugly argument and work it out for His good and His glory after they part ways.